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Intelligence Memorandum

Developments in Sino-Soviet Relations

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INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Developments in Sino-Soviet Relations

Since the announcement of the Brezhnev-Nixon summit in early May, Sino-Soviet rivalry has focused on competition for Washington's favor, long a controlling factor in the policies of both Peking and Moscow. Within days after the dates of the summit were announced, Peking, clearly worried that the summit would advance detente in Europe, completed plans for a diplomatic tour of its own. Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei was sent to Europe, where he reiterated the pro-US, pro-NATO, and anti-Soviet positions of China. Moscow, always sensitive about Chinese "meddling" in Europe, missed no opportunity to disparage Chi's trip.

The Soviets presented the summit as an event of extraordinary significance, but have let the agreements speak for themselves and have not implied that they are aimed at any third party. Peking gave the event almost no media coverage. In private, the Chinese dismissed the agreements as "meaningless," but they are probably concerned that the over-all impact of the summit will be to relax US and Western vigilance and make it more difficult for China to play upon European fears of Soviet expansionism.

While the Washington-Moscow-Peking triangle has captured most of the attention in recent weeks, Peking and Moscow have continued to jockey for position in Japan and North Korea. Improvement in Soviet-Japanese relations slowed to a crawl, and Premier Kim Il-song expressed discontent with both his powerful allies.

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A Diplomatic Tour

Just 12 days after the dates for the Nixon-Brezhnev summit were announced, the Chinese firmed up plans for a diplomatic tour by Foreign Minister Chi Peng-fei. The tour had been in the works for some time, but the timing and itinerary were clearly influenced by Peking's desire to counter the expected impact of the summit talks. Chi traveled to London, Paris, Teheran, and Karachi; the messages he carried were in large measure related to events in Washington.

The itinerary itself conveyed a message. By stopping first in London, Chi appeared to signal that Peking now finds Britain's pro-US, pro-NATO, and pro-European posture more congenial than the more "independent" policies of France, Communist China's oldest friend in Europe. His stop-over in Iran--a rather startling move--suggested a new interest in Persian Gulf politics with a declining concern over purely Arab matters.

Chi also conveyed Peking's message by direct remarks during his visits. While there was nothing startling or even new in Chi's talks with European officials, one theme was stressed over and over: Europeans must place renewed emphasis on their defense ties with Washington and must be wary of Soviet efforts to "dislodge" the US from Europe. Undoubtedly to add weight to this argument, Chi warned that of the two superpowers, the US was on the defensive. He asked Europe to be more "understanding" of present US economic difficulties. Chi seemed primarily concerned that the Soviet "peace offensive" would lead to a change of the military balance in Europe; he argued that MBFR negotiations in Vienna were even more "dangerous" than the Conference on European Cooperation and Security. He again encouraged the Europeans not to forsake their reliance on the US nuclear umbrella. Unsaid, but clearly on Chi's mind, was concern that the present trend toward detente in Europe could allow the Soviets to shift more of their military weight to the Sino-Soviet border.

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In Iran, Chi publicly endorsed the Shah's buildup of US supplied arms. In addition, he concurred with the Shah's claim that Iran was facing dangers from both the "east and west"--an obvious reference to India and Iraq, each of which has a treaty of friendship with Moscow. Chi thereby implied that Peking would like to see greater cooperation between Iran and Pakistan, perhaps as a counterweight to the USSR's clients. Chi's public espousal of the Iranian view of power relationships in the Gulf clearly throws down the gauntlet to Iraq. Both Pakistan and Iran have reasonably cordial relations with Washington. Chi also explicitly stated his worries about European detente and its effect on the situation along the Sino-Soviet borders.

"Enemies of Detente"

The Soviets carefully followed the course of Chi's visits. Several days before his arrival in Britain, Izvestia printed a wide-ranging critique of Chinese foreign policy. The article stressed that the Chinese were enemies of detente, trying to destroy the current system of international relations and to frustrate Moscow's dealings with major Western powers. The Soviet media were particularly critical of China's "negative attitude" toward the European security conference and Moscow's treaties with West Germany. During the visits, Soviet news media insisted that Chi had failed to "negate the positive role" played by the USSR in "achieving peace in Europe."

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[REDACTED] the Soviets have been pressing their East European allies to support the Soviet line in the dispute with Peking. Increased anti-Chinese propaganda began to appear in the Polish press earlier this year, reversing an improvement in Polish-Chinese relations briefly evident last summer. The output of most East European media reveals a similar pattern. A Romanian official remarked privately last month, however,

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that Bucharest has no interest in participating in the current Soviet-directed ideological struggle.

The Soviets are telling their allies that relations between the USSR and China are worse than ever and that Moscow will not be conciliatory in the face of Peking's intransigence. In a con-

25X1

Taking Center Stage

One reason that Moscow has recently de-emphasized its relations with Japan was its pre-occupation with preparations for the Washington summit, which, it felt, would curb the rise in Peking's international prestige and bring the global responsibilities of the US and the USSR into full view. Nevertheless, following the pattern of last year's Brezhnev-Nixon meeting, the Soviets have been generally restrained in their exploitation of the summit vis-a-vis China. Pravda has referred to "certain powers" (presumably China) that are trying to cast the Soviet-American detente as collusion among the super-powers, but there have been no direct attempts to relate the summit to Sino-Soviet problems.

Peking's Reaction

To avoid any implication that the summit was a success, the Chinese reaction has been decidedly low-key. During the summit, Chinese media were silent, and when it finally was mentioned, NCNA played down the US angle by billing Brezhnev's journey as a visit to "the United States and France." The account enumerated the agreements signed by the US and the USSR, including that on the prevention of nuclear war, but did not comment on the issues.

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Officials of Chinese-owned newspapers in Hong Kong, who base their views on guidance from Peking, played down the summit as making no real contribution to world peace, noting that no accord had been reached on either the Middle East or Cambodia. The agreement on preventing nuclear war was dismissed as a "meaningless document," despite its obvious implications for Peking's relations with both Moscow and Washington. Asked if Chou En-lai would visit Washington, one official said that Sino-US relations have reached a stage where it is "no longer necessary" to convene such high-level sessions.

This last line is a not very convincing effort to make a virtue of necessity. The Chinese obviously would like to balance the Brezhnev-Nixon summit with a Chou-Nixon summit, but are constrained by their lack of full diplomatic relations with Washington and by Chou's often-repeated affirmation that he would never travel to Washington as long as the Nationalists maintain an embassy there.

The summit almost certainly has disturbed Peking far more than it would like to admit. The Chinese ambassador [redacted] told [redacted] that Peking viewed the Soviet-US agreements as an effort by the two superpowers to protect their nuclear monopoly. Another Chinese official said privately that the summit could eventually lead to a Soviet-US agreement on force levels in Europe that would increase the Soviet military threat to China.

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There have thus far been no really authoritative indications of the Chinese assessment of the agreement on prevention of nuclear war. The Chinese may welcome an agreement that, if respected, would preclude a first-strike nuclear attack against China from either superpower. Even though Peking is convinced that Moscow cannot be trusted, it may take some comfort in at least the moral weight of US participation in an agreement that would foreclose Soviet nuclear attack on China.

-7-

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Balanced against this, however, is Peking's concern that the lessening of Soviet-US tensions will lead to a significant reduction of US conventional forces in Europe and a decreased US commitment to the nuclear defense of both Europe and Japan. The Chinese nightmare is a world where the US moves away from its global role, leaving first Europe and then Asia open to Moscow. In their view, both the US and the Europeans are being captured by a false sense of detente, which in the end will serve Moscow's purposes only too well. The nuclear agreement, in particular, allows Moscow to project itself as a peaceful world power, deflecting Peking's efforts to portray it as aggressive and expansionist.

Triangular Sensitivity

Clearly the Soviets view the agreement on the prevention of nuclear war as the crowning achievement of the summit and also as a possible tool in the triangular relationship between Moscow, Peking, and Washington. Article Four of the agreement commits the US and the USSR to "make every effort to avert" the risk of nuclear war "between either party and other countries," begging the question of US response in the event of threatened Sino-Soviet hostilities.

In the past, the Soviets have been particularly touchy about reports that US intervention had averted a Sino-Soviet conflict and that the Soviets had tried to obtain a promise of US support should a conflict develop. On 1 June, for instance, the Soviet Embassy in Washington issued a strong statement denying reports that US diplomatic intervention had "averted an inevitable nuclear attack" by the Soviets on China. (Embassy statements of this type are not unprecedented, but have been rare; usually they have dealt with Jewish activities directed against the Soviets in the US.)

The Embassy statement was followed by press comment rejecting the proposition that the Soviets posed a threat to China. Pravda emphatically denied a report that the Soviet troop build-up on the Chinese border was linked with the Soviet diplomatic offensive in the West. The article observed darkly that "no few leaders" in the West would like to put the USSR and China on a collision course and "warm their hands on this."

The Korean Angle

Moscow has reason to be pleased with recent events on the Korean peninsula. Until recent months, the North Koreans have probably regarded the Chinese a bit more favorably than the Soviets, but now the balance has shifted slightly toward Moscow. Peking has been unwilling to give strong backing to North Korean demands for a pull-out of US forces from South Korea. Thus, in April when Pyongyang issued a propaganda blast claiming the presence of US forces in South Korea was the primary obstacle to progress in the North-South talks, Peking gave only lukewarm support, while Moscow wholeheartedly endorsed the North Korean position.

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The South Korean diplomatic initiative of 23 June may further complicate Pyongyang's relations

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with both its major allies. Pyongyang chose to stand pat and oppose dual membership of the Koreans in the UN on the grounds that it would perpetuate the division of Korea. Peking gave rapid and specific support to the North's position and Moscow provided a somewhat less hearty endorsement. Nevertheless, both Moscow and Peking have accepted in principle the eventual entry of both Germanies into the UN, and it is probable that they see eventual dual Korean membership in the international organization as a contribution to stability on the Korean peninsula. In this sense, Pyongyang may be painfully aware that it can no longer play Moscow off against Peking as effectively as in the past, because the priorities of both its major allies have changed.

Border Incidents

With the thawing of the rivers along the northeastern Sino-Soviet border, Moscow and Peking have been performing their annual ritual of exchanging protests over frontier violations. Apparently there have been no major clashes, but arguments over the location of main navigation channels and ownership of river islands have reached a high pitch. There have been several collisions and near collisions followed by warnings and implied threats. Many of the incidents have involved the placement of navigation markers on disputed islands, with each side accusing the other of improper conduct.

For the past several years the focal point of the border struggle has been the dispute over ownership of Hei-hsia-tzu island (called "Big Ussuri" by the Soviets) that lies directly opposite Khabarovsk at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri rivers. This dispute has caused the last three annual sessions of the Sino-Soviet Navigation Committee to fail, and has hindered progress at the border talks in Peking.

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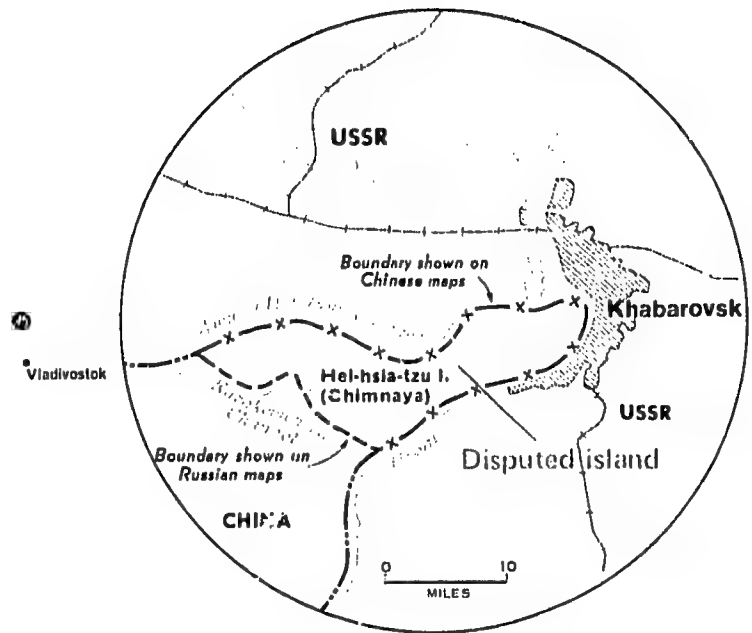
Incidents Along Sino-Soviet Border

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MONGOLIA

CHINA

25X1



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[redacted] On Border
Guards Day (28 May), the Soviets ran a newspaper article reporting a shooting incident on the "southern border" that involved several Soviet and "intruder" casualties. This is only the second time since the open fighting in 1969 that Moscow has given official publicity to a border incident. American correspondents who returned from a government-sponsored tour in May in the Tadzhik Republic got the impression from talking with local residents that minor incidents, occasionally involving gunfire, occurred there every seven to ten days.

-13-

25X1

The increased tension along the border does not mean that either side wants or expects a repeat performance of the fighting that broke out along the rivers in 1969. There is an increase in incidents every year around this time, and neither side seems inclined to capitalize on them for propaganda purposes.

Nevertheless, the potential for serious frictions remains. The Chinese appeared to be particularly assertive in testing the limits of Soviet endurance on the waters near Khabarovsk, and the Soviets have displayed great sensitivity to Chinese probes in this area. Most likely, the USSR was particularly concerned that Peking was trying to stir up trouble that would embarrass the Soviets on the eve of Brezhnev's trip to the US.

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